THE SYRIA OF CULTURE WHAT SHE GAVE TO THE WEST

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The discovery of ancient inscriptions and various types of artistic evidence have established the cultural position of Syria, proving that greater Syria has presented advanced cultural achievements to mankind since the dawn of history, and that her culture is not inferior to those of Mesopotamia and the Nile.

The culture of Syria dates back to the third millennium B.C. and is represented at all historical stages, and because of her geographical position, she has been in continous contact with the world.

Since the beginning of western civilization in the Greek and Etruscan Periods, Syria has been the leading source of beliefs, writing and music. Syria participated in Roman world rule and played role in the spread of Christianity. Through her presence in Spain she was involved in the renaissance of a part of Europe whish had been submergerd in the darkness of the middle ages. Many manifestations of Syrian culture also reached the west, carried by the Crusaders. And Syria also played her part in the early period of Islam when Damascus was the capital of the Umayyads.

To begin our discussion of the Syria of Culture and what she gave the west, let us first discuss the alphabet invented by the ancient Syrians and taken by them to the west.

In 1933 a small stone tablet was discovered in the City of Ugarit (Ras Shamra), near Lattakia, bearing 30 cuneiform characters. After investigation and study it was proved that these cuneiform characters had no known equivalent, and researches were convinced that this was the first alphabet in the world and that it dated back to the middle of the second millennium B.C.

The real importance of the Ahiram Tomb alphabet, which goes back to the thirteenth century B.C. and is characterised by beautiful relief drawings representing Ahiram, the Father of Ishu Bal, the King of Sidon, or possibly Jubeil who made the statue, in front of which stands a row of wailing-woman and slave girls, some of whom are renting their clothes, a sign of grief, lies in the fact that the text inscribed upon it is in alphabetic letters, which are considered to be the earliest forms of the Arabic and Latin alphabets.

From earliest time, the Canaanites, the ancient Syrian Arabes who lived on the Mediterranean Coast, adopted the script which we saw in Ugarit. Here, the script commonly used was cuneiform which was

widespread throughout Mesopotamia and used by the Akkadians, the Amorites, the ancient Arabs and subsequently by the canaanite inhabitants of Ugarit. This script was used because of the method of engraving on clay tablets with special style. The most important feature of the type of cuneiform first used in Ugarit was that it was not alphabetical, like the chinese script. Many of the signs conveying short phonetic sounds, which had to be added to the words were removed and only those symbols which suited the phonetic style remained. The thirty letters of the Ugaritic alphabet formed the first alphabet in the world, and the researcher Georges Rierrot says: "The invention of the alphabet was a very important event, greater even than the invention of printing, and cannot be compared with any other event in human history. The analysis of speech and its reduction to its primary elements requires a great feat of mental labour."

Although the Ahiram engraving provides us with a clearly readable and understandable alphabet, because of its dependance for the shape and form of every letter on its physical representation of known objects, it is possible for a given sign to leave some doubt as to the particular physical form it represents. The names of the letters help us to confirm their signification.

The names of the letters in the Canaanite and phoenician languages are the same as the names of the Arabic letters. The first letter (as we see in the accompanying table) is called "Alif" which means "Cow" and is symbolized by the distinguishing features of the cow, a two-horned head. "Beta" (al-Ba') means "house" and is symbolized by the plan of a room or a courtyard. "Jamil" or (al-Jim) is represented by a hump. "Dalet" (ad-Dal) means "door knocker" and takes this form. "Ya" (al-ya) means hand and is symbolized by a forearm and upper arm. "kof" (al-Kaf) means "palm of the hand" and its symbol is similar to the palm of a hand. "Ras" (ar-Ra') means "head" and is shaped like a head. "Sin" (as-Sin) means "tooth" and the letter is shaped like a molar tooth. "Ma" (al-Mim) means "water" and is expressed by waves. Etc ...

This alphabet spread to the Nabatean and Aramean scripts and from there to primitive and modern Arabic.

In the same way it spread to the Greek and Latin scripts as is clearly shown in the accompanying table.

Historians say that Cadmus was the brother of Europa and went to Greece in search of his sister and after he arrived at Pioty and founded the city of Tiba, north of Athens. There he taught the people the Canaanite alphabet, which remained in continual use, with some changes,

bearing its original ancient Canaanite names. Subsequently, this alphabet spread into all the western scripts after its adoption by the Romans.

A bronze coin from the time of the Emperor Gallian was discovered bearing on one side the picture of Cadmus teaching the people of Tiba the letters of the Phoenician alphabet. This coin is at present kept in the National Library in Paris.

Herodatus (425 B.C.) wrote that Cadmus (the son of Aginor) and the Phoenicians imparted to the Greeks much knowledge including that of letters of which the Greeks were previously ignorant. At first, the Cadmusians used the letters of their well-known Phoenician alphabet, but in time this was subjected to change as was their language. At that time, most of Greeks living close to the Phoenicians were Ionians. These latter learnt the letters from their neighbours and used them and their Phoenician names, albeit in a slightly corrupted form. (Herodotus, the "History" sec.5. part 58). The first Greeks added vowels to these letters.

In about 800 B.C. the Etruscans appeared in northern Italy, coming originally from the Syrian coast and Cilicia. They carreid the phonetic alphabet to the Romans and it appeared in the Latin language. St. Cyril made use of these same letters to lay the basis of the Slavic script.

The small clay tablet discovered in Ra's Shamra (Ugarit) bearing the first alphabet in History is not the only discovery to make us aware of the wide-ranging Syrian Cultural influence on the world. This archaeological site has yielded us other tablets including one bearing the oldest song in the world dating back to 1400 B.C., which is 1000 years earlier than the oldest known piece of music in the west; "Orestes" the musical play composed by Eurypides the greatest Greek tragic poet.

It is clear that the Ra's Shamra tablets contain the basic principles of musicology as set out by Pythagiras in 500 B.C., since they are based on the seven-note diatonic scale. This discovery has lead, says Dr. Kilmer, to a fundamental change of the determining of the age and history of western music.

The piece of music is a love song between the gods which was recently performed on a specially made lyre, similar to the instrument discovered by a British archaeologist in the city of Ur in Iraq, which is as old as the music found at Ugarit.

After 10 years of practice, a Musician named Grockes performed this piece of music at a large concert at the University of Berkeley. It aroused the wonder and surprise of the audience to listen to the 4500-year-old origins of their music.

The story of the Syrian girl, Europe, which tells how the continent of Europe got its name, is one of the gems of world literature. It was told by a poet from Alexandria, named Musikus, in 200 A.D. and he attributed it to the Greeks.

The history of the Greeks is legends, and a legend is a story which mixes phantasy and reality. History is not history if it is not poetry. The Iliad of Homer, for example, is history with all its Fables, Phantasy and legends.

In the land of Canaan, the low lands of greater Syria, there was a king named Aginor or Ashinar, who ruled Phoenicia. This name may possibly be derived from Phiniqus, the son of Aginor, or perhaps from the word for "purple" Phiniqo Adiphoni, or from the word for "cedar"

Aginor was not ordinary king; he was the son of a god. His father was Poseidon, Yem, and his mother was Libya, who brought the continent of Africa and gave it her name at first.

The children of Aginor were Europa, who gave her name to the continent of Europe, and Cadmus, who gave his name to Cadmea in Greece.

The poet tells us how the Syrian princess gave the continent her name and how this name spread, embodiedin the person of the beautiful enchantress, Europa daughter of Aginor.

Europa, daughter of Aginor, thre King

The season is spring and the night is clothed in moonlight,
The ground is green with foliage and the flowers are a red cloak,
The fragrance of the land of Canaan anoints her brown face,
She is Europa. She spread her supple body on a bed,
Lying awake. Sleep was a stronger to her.
She was a beloved princess and her father was famous Aginor,
The king of the Phoenicians, who roamed the far horizons.
And the Mediterranean on happy ships.
She dreamt of seafaring on a boisterous vessel
to a land unknown, but to men of courage.
No conqueror had seen this land, nor had Aginor built on it.
Her dream disturbed her, but she dreamt on with longing and conceit.
Perhaps the gods, and at their head, Zeus, the great Champion
Came to her in a dream in ugly guise.
He said to her, "Be a great continent, O great daughter of Aginor".
She, who enchanted the world with her beauty, awoke from her dream

with the dawn,
(And the dreams of beautiful girls are most often realized at dawn).
She wondered with her handmaidens like a moon in their midst,
They wore transparent garments like a claud veiling the light of the sun.
They began to fill their baskets with neo-opened flowers buds
And princess Europa gave the flowers their perfume.
On high, Zeus was reclining and watching the earth and its inhabitants,
Searching for beauty in the orchards and deserts of the earth.
He saw this most perfectly beautiful girl, she smiled, and he saw only her.
The heart of Zeus was smitten by Cupid's arrow and he swoo,
Then straightened. Eros and Aphrodite assisted him and fired his desire.
Despite the cunning of his wife, Hesa, the god, if he desired a thing, then he desired it.
Zeus took the form of a chestnut bull with horns decorated with precious stones.
Seeming tame and meek, he attracted the maidens to his perfume, which wafted from him like a breeze.
He sang the hymn of love to Europa with beautiful words and lovely tune
He bowed before her and she mounted his broad bade and he sprung away like a gentle zephyr
He ploughed the sea, proud of his burden, victorious in his beautiful rider
The dolphins of the sea, greeted him and helped him, playing the horn and the drum
Poseidon, her grandfather, walked on the sea guarding the lovers.
Europa hesitated and took fright from the site of the dolphins
And held onto Zeus's horn. She felt the warmth of love which joins East and West,
And she called out at the top of her voice, "I am Europa, do not flee from me dear bull".
From under her he said, "I am the great god Zeus. I fell in love with you and love works wonders".
Crete was sleeping and did not see the awful celebration".
The horn was blown, the city arose and the continent awoke.
It was blown on the horn that Europa was the wife of the gods and had come from the ancient world.
To discover a continent with no name, whose image was unknown to the nations.

Thus, at the dawn of history, Syria named an unknown continent. It is possible that this legend hides a deep significance which reveals itself as the discovery of a continent by this beautiful princess carried on the back of the god from her country to an unknown world, which she discovered and to which she gave her name. She bore children to Zeus, each one of whom might have founded a state afterwards?

The Greeks always believed that the place of origin of the name "Europa" was Syria, and when they came with Philip of Macedonia to Syria in the third century B.C., they called the first city they built "Dura Europos" (Salihiyet al-Furat in the governorate of Deir ez-Zor).

The discovery of red dye on the Syrian coast and its distribution in the lands of the Greeks and Romans caused this region to be name the "Land of Purple". The Greek legend says that purple dye was first produced for a Syrian maiden called Tyrus, with whom Hercules fell in love. On day she was walking on the Syrian coast, when suddenly she saw a reddish-purple colour on the mouth of her dog which was eating shell fish. The purple colour pleased her and she asked Hercules to bring her a garment of the same colour or she would deny him her love. Hercules collected the fish from the shells and plants and dyed a garment with the colour and present it to her. This was the first appearance and the beginning of the spread of this colour in the world.

Syria played a major role in the Imperial Roman Period. Many Syrians moved to Rome taking with them their culture, thought and art, and the Romans relied on them in their cultural affairs to the extent that Juvenal, the Roman satirical post, said in 140 A.D., criticizing this enormous influence, "The River Orontes has flood into the Tiber for a long time, bringing with it the language, traditions and culture of Syria".

This influence was underlined when a Syrian family assumed power in Rome. This was the Severus Family, which ruled the Ampire from 211-235 A.D. by Philip the Arabian, the Roman emperor who was born and grew up in Shahba in southern Syria.

The Severus Family was composed of Septimus the Lybian, who came from Libya and spoke Phoenician, and his wife, Julia Domna, who came from Homš and spoke Aramaic, a sister language of Phoenician. Julia was the daughter of Basian of Homs, the high priest of the mountain god (Aila Gabal), in Homs. Julia was endowed with intelligence, beauty and culture and she married Septimus in 175 A.D. when he was a senior official. He became emperor in 211 A.D. and built a palace on the Palatine Hill. His wife excercised her authority, sharing in her husband's victories and rule. Rome conferred on her the titles "Mother of the Na-

tion", "Mother of the Senate" and "Mother of the Armies". She opened the doors of her palace to Syrian scholars, thinkers, philosophers and religious men.

Julia asked a number of them for help, for example; her relative, the junsprudent, Papinian; Ulpian; Diogenes, The writer and translator; Diocathius, the historian; and Philostratus, the sophist.

She also relied on her sister, Julia Misa, who too had came from Homs with her two beautiful young daughters.

Julia had two sons, Basyan, who became the emperor of Rome and took the name, Marcus Aurelius or Caracalla, and Jina, who killed by his brother after his father's death in order that he might inherit the throne.

When Caracalla was treacherously murdered, Julia grieved for him and starved herself to death. Her ashes were interred in the tomb of Augustus in Rome with solemn ceremony.

Julia Misa had more influence on politics and religion, leading Roman society towards a more eastern lifestyle and helping to spread Syrian customs and traditioal.

She was a widow of a Syrian and had born him two beautiful daughters; Julia Sumia, who married her cousin Caracalla, and Julia Mamia, who married the son of Caracalla, the emperor Aila Gabal.

Rome bears the mark of the emperor Caracalla in the form of the great baths, the ruins of which have remained standing to this day, covering an area of 11 hectares. It held 9,600 visitors and has facilities for all kinds of sports, and contain a large library. It was a social and sporting center and not simply a bath. It was decorated with mosaic, inlaid marble and magnificent statues, and surrounded by parks and gardens.

Caracalla is considered to be one of the most prominent of the Roman emperors to have had an important social influence. He issued the famous Caracalla Decree which made all Roman citizens equal and subject to one low which accorded them freedom and basic rights. Caracalla was exemplary in his modesty and good treatment of the people and soldiers, with whom he would live and eat and to whose requests he would listen and whose problems he would solve. He was killed in Haran in north Syria in his prime and at the peak of his glory.

Caracalla was so named because he wore the caracal, a Syrian garment resembling the aba (woollen cloak).

After the murder of Caracalla and the death of his mother, Julia Domna, from grief for him, riots in Rome, would have shaken Syrian authority to its roots had not the 3rd Gallio Division, which was made up

of Syrian soldiers and stationed near Masyaf. Swayed by Julia Misa, proclaimed Ephtios, the son of Julia Sumia and Caracalla, Emperor of Rome under the title Aila Gabal. His grandmother, Julia Misa recovered her position and command of affairs and backed the young, 14-year-old emperor and her daughter with a new Syrian entourage.

Ephtius inherited the title of high priest in the Temple of Homs, where the Pyramidal Black Stone, which represented the god Aila Gabal, was the holy form of Syrian worship. Ephtius had the Black Stone transported to Rome and built a temple to house it, and honoured it above the other holy symbols. Nearby he built an altar and performed the rites and ceremonies in the temple himself in the Syrian manner. He was followed in this by all the men of the state.

Later he built another temple in the suberbs of Rome and had the Black Stone transported between the two temples on a chariot decorated with gold and precious stones accompanied by official ceremonial.

This doctrinal deviation provoked the fanatical among the Roman leaders and they conspired together and killed the emperor and his mother, Julia Sumia, and many of the Syrian entourage. Their bodies were thrown into the Tiber in 229 A.D., the two temples were demolished and the Black Stone was returned to Syria.

Aila Gabal did not listen to the advice of his grandmother, the wise and able Julia Misa, who had expected this sad end to befall her granson and therefore had been endeavouring to replace him with her other grandson, Alexianus, the son of Mamia, her second daughter. He became emperor in the place of Aila Gabal and ascended the throne with the name Alexander Sever.

Like his brother-in-law, Aila Gabal, Alexander Sever kept up his connection with Syria. They both held the position of high priest in Homs at the same time as they occupied the throne.

Alexander was concerned with democracy and relied on a council of advisors. Possibly his reliance on low and justice and his insistance on democracy was not to the liking of some parties who lived on favour and distinction. They killed him and his mother, Mamia, in his tent in 235 A.D. after a reign of thirteen years.

Philip the Arabian is the most important Syrian personality to attain, through his worthiness, the peak of authority in the vast Roman Empire.

A huge statue of the Emperor Philip the Arabian Faces the podium of the leaders of the city council of Rome which met inside the Capital building. The Mayor of Rome told me that Philip the Arabian is seen as

the symbol of the meeting of east and west and the symbol of the beginning of the appearance of the Roman Christian Period.

The Syrian emperor takes the credit for extricating Rome from the distress which befell her after the Syrian Family, ceverus, was destroyed with the assassination of Alexander Severus and his mother by rebels in 235 A.D. Philip was elected emperor backed by the Syrian Gallic Division. He was already known for his ability as a leader, his cleverness and his good character. At that time he was chief of military protection in the city of Zita which is situated close to Salhiyet al-Furat. Philip was born in Shahba with the name Marcus Julius Philipus, the son of a Sheikh from Hauran. When he came to power, he did not forget his native country, making Busra a metropolis and erecting many new buildings in Shahba; the theater, the Philipium and the baths. He also constructed water channel and main street, which can be seen clearly to this day. From that time Shahba has also born the name Philipopolis.

Credit also goes to philip the Arabian for freeing the Christians and returning their property. He strengthened governmental authority in Rome and made peace with Sabur I, the king of Persia. He also made war on the uncivilized Danube tribes and was victorious over them. He then returned to Rome in order to construct a palace on the Silius Hill. He made use of his Syrian relatives in the government, making his brother commander of the eastern armies and his brother-in-law governor of eastern Europe. He honoured and deified his father, erecting a temple to him in Shahba.

A number of Syrian architects participated in the building of the large monuments of the Roman Empire, since the Syrian architects, with their extraordinary skill, built monuments superior to those of Rome. We can still see the antiquities of Damascus, Apamea, Palmyra, Busra, Shahba, Baalbek and Jerash, all of which are the work of architects from their forerunners and were unrevalled in this type of architecture. Roman architecture took the building of the arch and dome from the Syrian architectural tradition, the most famous dome in the world, the dome of the Pantheon, was built by the Syrian architect, Apollodor of Damascus. We know that this huge edifice was first built in 27 A.D., in the time of Augustus, by the architect Ualerius. After it had been demolished, in the time of the Emperor Hadrian in 138 A.D., Apollodor of Damascus, known as the most skilfull architect of his time, designed and oversaw the building of the dome. It rises 43.50m above the ground and its diameter measures half its height. It has neither drum nor windows and instead has an opening at the top, 9 meters in diameter. Today

it is the tomb of several important people, among the Raphael, the famous artist and Machiavelli, the philosopher.

Apollorodus of Damascus, who appears to have been born in Damascus in 80 A.D., specialized in large architectural projects. His widespread fame prompted the Emperor Trajan to invite him to Rome to build the forum which still stands in the Italian Capital.

The forum was completed in 114 A.D.,the form of an open space surrounded by stepped seating for adminstrators and economists, where they exchanged ideas and merchandise and solved their proplems. This kind of open courtyard, the form, is usually built in the center of the city (the metropolis) and was copied from the Greeks who called it the "agora".

Apollodorus also erected other structures; the palace of justice; two libraries; the Basilica of Olympia; and huge commemorative column, the column of Trajan, which is still standing in Rome today. The column is shaped like a cylindrical minaret, is 43 meters high, and is composed of eighteen sections with a circular staircase inside. The column is covered with engravings in relief, representing approximately 2,000 persons in addition to vehicles and war gear. The military scenes represent the victorious war of Trajan in Dachia. At the base of the column is a space where the ashes of emperor where placed, inside a golden urn. The art of Apollodurus astonished the Roman emperors, and after the death of Trajan (135 A.D.), a friend of Apollodorus', who was held in high esteem in his time, Hadrian ascended the throne and began his persistant patronage of Apollodorus by entrusting him with the construction of the Dome of the Pantheon. As a bridge engineer he constructed the largest bridge in Roman history, the Diroga bridge over the Danube, a miracle of engineering. He was later assigned the building of a large temple, but died mysteriously before its completion, after a disagreement with the emperor.

Apollodorus was one of the most brilliant architects in history and we have a right to be proud of the genius of this architect, who was emulated after his death. He was imitated by Michaelangelo in the Farnese palace in Florence and influenced and the vendome column built in Paris in the time of Napolean.

The emigration of the Etruscans from the Syrian coast and Cilicia to the North of Italy from the eighth century B.C. onwards is a known fact. This people, who founded the ancient culture of Italy, also influenced the building of the Roman culture. In Italy, the Lombardy region is still considered the cradle of the first culture to come from Syria.

Historians admit that Byzantine Christian art, which took root in neaghbouring parts of Italy, France and Spain had spread through these areas bearing distinctive characteristics, is Syrian in origin and is forerunner of Gothic art.

Syria played an important role in the early period of Christianity and in its spread in Europe. In this connection we may mention St. Hanania of Damacus and his role in saving the Apostle Paul. Hanania was one of the followers of Christ and one of the first of the 72 pupils mentioned by St. Luke. It was Hanania who wiped the eyes of Shawul of Tarsus and rescued the Apostle Paul from a Jewish attempt on his life for his preaching christianity. St. Paul hid in one of the houses of Damascus possibly even the house of Hanania himself. He reached the Kisan Gate by means of a tunnel and there his friends helped him to escape by lowering him from the top of the wall in abastet. The house adjascent to the gate was converted into the church of St. Paul.

It was St. Paul who later took the christian religion to Europe and he was also the first to set down the Gospels in Latin. By means of him, Christianity spread to all parts of Europe.

The Emperor Nero, the tyrant, issued a law to suppress the christian movement and in the implementation of this law Paul died by the sword in 67 A.D. and St. Peter was crucified.

Antioch was the first of christianity and Paul, among others set out from this town on his missionary work. One of the cleverest of its religious men was John the Damascene, the Golden Mouth. It is said that the image of Christ which spread throughout the world, despite the fact that it originated in Antioch, was called the "Syrian Christ". The image had previously been taken from a representation of Apollo.

At the beginning of the Umayyad Period, the Syrian Leon III was made Byzantine Emperor. He was called the Arab Emperor because of his growing up with and his continuous links with the doctrine of Monophysitism. He is known in history for his role the opposition of worshippers of the icons which were used throughout the Byzantine Empire, backed by the men of religion.

Leon fought against the use of pictures, statues, illustrated cloth and medallions and he used the army against tens of thousands of priests, at the head whom was the Pope. Leon III was born in Mara'sh and worked as a simple soldier in Syria. He then became a partisan of the Umayyad Caliph (he spoks excellent Greek and Arabic). Despite this he defended Constantinople when it was besieged by Muslima Ibn 'Abd Al-Malik in 715 A.D. Although he had protected the city from occupation, he built a

mosque there and forced the Byzantines to build accomodation near the royal palace for the Arab prisoners of war. They also set up a statue to the general of Muslima, 'Abd Allah Al-Batal.

When Yazid b. Mu'awiya ordered the removal of religious pictures from the church because he considered their use a pagan practise, this action impressed Leon III and he undertook a bold iconoclastic campaign to put an end to religious pictures and forbade the worship of them.

'Abd ar-Rahman ad-Dakhil moved from Syria to Andalusia in order to prompt the move of the Syrians, with their culture and art, to the west, at the beginning of the period of Muslim conquests, under the leadership of Tariq b. Ziyad. It is possible to consider the first three centuries in Spain as the formative period of Islamic culture, which was superior to European Culture. The Syrians were the builders of this culture and its achievements and character are attributable to them.

With the Syrians, and architectural style, and the art of minaret and mosque building also moved to Spain. We know that the four towers constructed around the Great Umayyad Mosque are Islamic minarets built by Al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik. The two towers on the western side were rebuilt in the Umayyad and Muslum Periods, but the ruins of the two minarets on the northern side can still be seen and have new minarets built over them. The square structure of the minarets was taken to the West and Andalusia. More than one minaret began to be built in each mosque, for example, the Mosque of Isbilia, the Mosque of Hassan in Rabat, at Kathbia Mosque in Marrakesh and the Mosque of Qairawan. These minarets were called Syrian minarets and their influence does not stop with these mosques. Art historians mention that from the time that Roman and Gothic church and cathedrals were first built, their steeples had the square shape of the Syrian minarets, showing the identity and origin of this architectural style, which spread throughout Europe.

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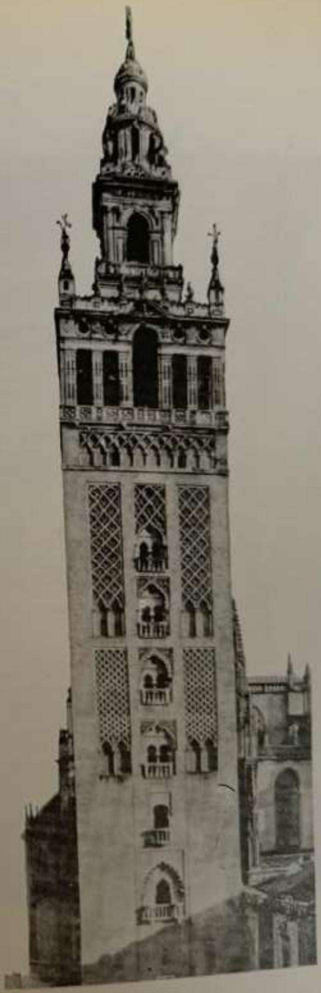
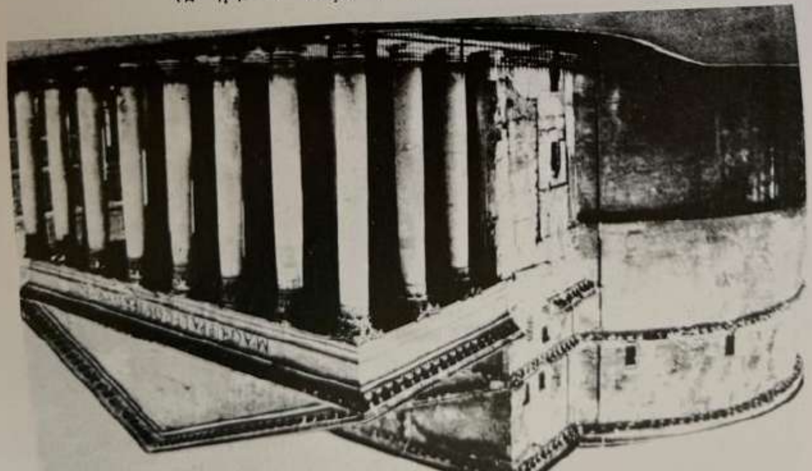
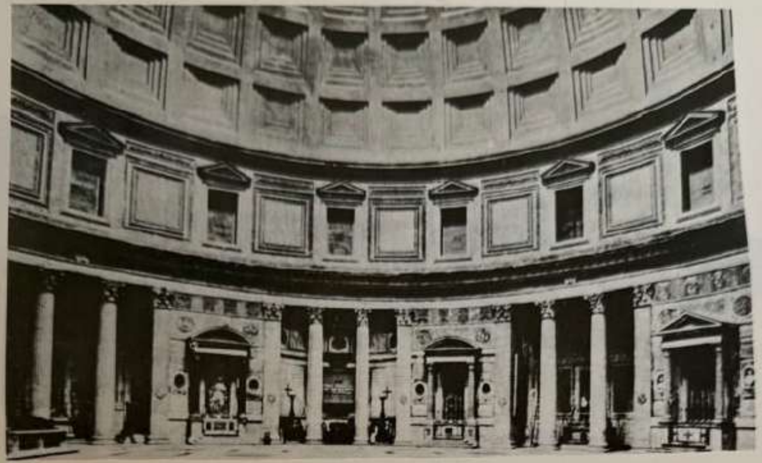


٢٣ ـ الجيرالدا ـ مئذنة جامع اشبيلية 23



٢١ - البانتيون - انشأ قبته ابو للودور الدمشقي في روما 21



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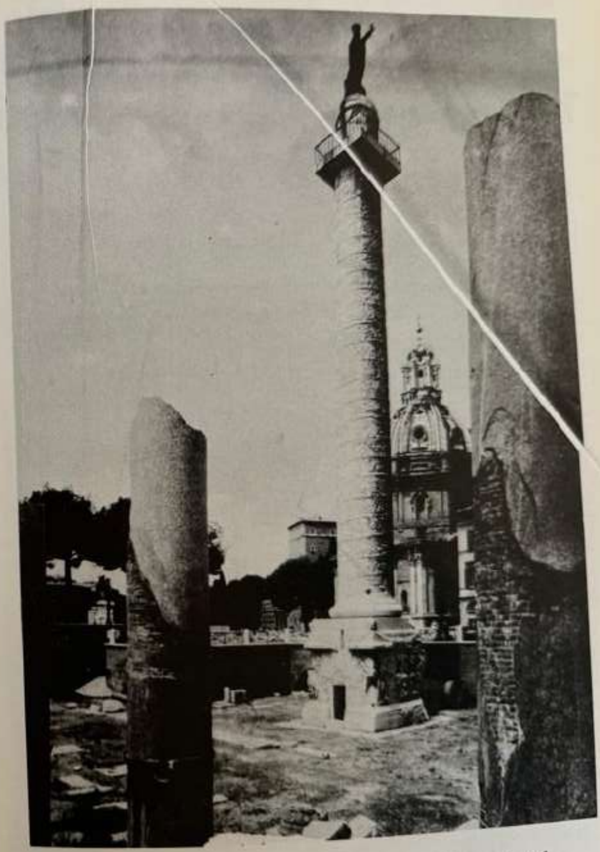

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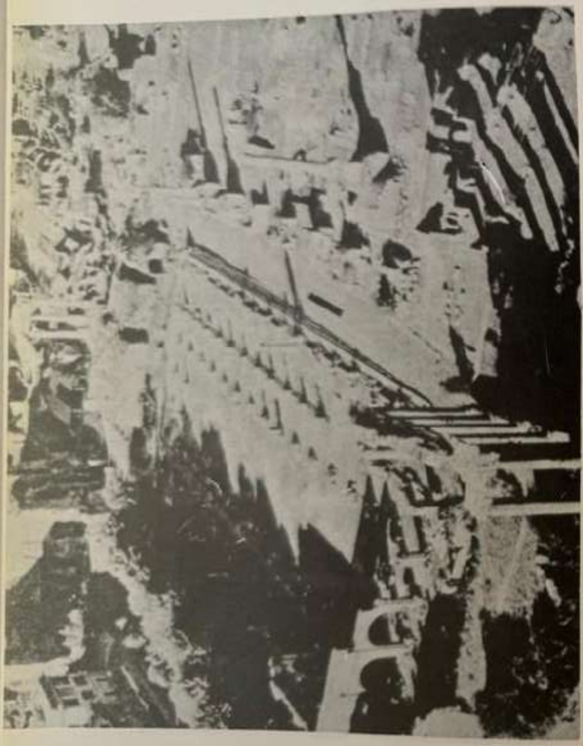
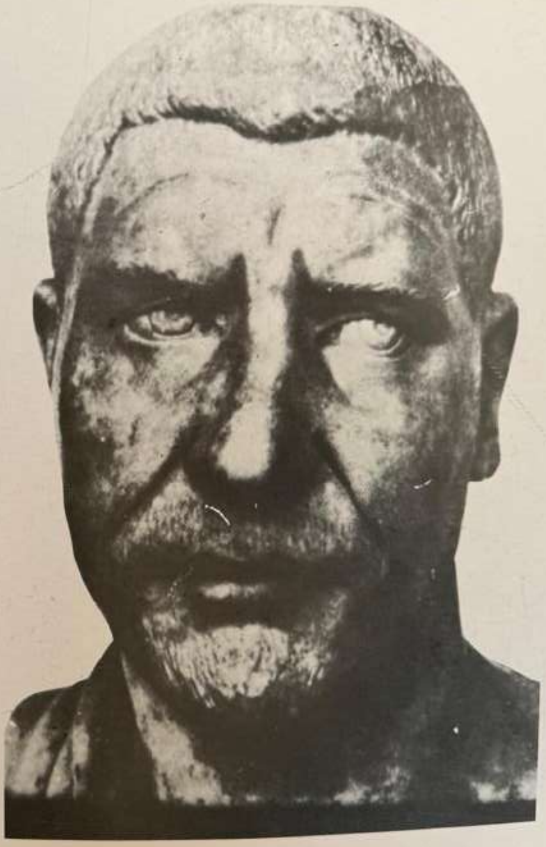


٢٠ - الاغورا - التي أنشأها ابو للودور الدمشقي في روما 20



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